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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 LA PAZ 003400

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2036

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: WILL THE REAL OPPOSITION LEADER PLEASE STAND UP?

REF: LA PAZ 03178

Classified By: ECOPOL Counselor Andrew Erickson for reason 1.4 (d).

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SUMMARY

1. (C) Evo Morales' election in December 2005 was a political earthquake in Bolivia, sweeping aside political expectations that have defined Bolivian politics for generations and at the same time breaking open fissures and offering up new possibilities. While President Morales' popularity has risen and fallen since his election, his popularity has surged since the hydrocarbons nationalization and his successful use of political hardball tactics to overcome an opposition-imposed blockade of the senate. For now, the traditional opposition appears to be crumbling under the GOB's pressure. While it is too early to discern the final shifts of Bolivia's political tectonic plates this cable is an effort to explore the new political geography of current and potentially future leaders of the country. End Summary.

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INDIGENOUS & REGIONAL LEADERS

2. (C) RENE JOAQUINO CABRERA: A mason by trade, Potosi Mayor Rene Joaquino Cabrera is an emerging politician known for competent management, reported honesty, and efforts to govern transparently. Despite a low public profile, Joaquino has been involved in politics since 1993 and has twice been elected mayor of Potosi. His political group, the Social Alliance of the People, has earned a reputation of acting independently and moderately to build consensus within Bolivia's Constituent Assembly (CA). However, Joaquino does not have the name recognition or funding necessary for a

national campaign. Given the number of potential candidates for the next presidential race, there may not be enough political space for Joaquino to make a convincing bid for national office. Despite these challenges to Joaquino's emergence nationally, his indigenous background and personal biography as a former child laborer in the country's mines could galvanize popular support.

13. (C) OSCAR GERARDO MONTES: A member of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) party, Tarija Mayor Oscar Montes is an intelligent strategist who understands the realities that the political opposition faces in Bolivia's current political climate. With a wealth of political experience that includes positions within national and local government, Montes has regional name recognition within Tarija and enjoys a good reputation. Understanding the political chasm that separates the country's eastern and western regions, Montes has expressed interest in creating a politically viable alternative to the MAS that includes an alliance among Bolivia's southern-most departments (Chuquisaca, Potosi, Ouro, and Tarija). He is politically aligned with Joaquino (see above). Poloffs believe a national ticket featuring Joaquino as the presidential candidate and Montes as the candidate for vice-president could empower Bolivia's southern departments and garner wide national support.

14. (C) PEDRO TICANA: Former minister of indigenous affairs under the Mesa and Rodriguez governments, Pedro Ticana is unaffiliated with a particular political party and is an effective political operator with a diverse political background. A former adviser to Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), Ticana is now closely aligned with Potosi Mayor Joaquino and eastern Bolivia. Helping Joaquino organize a new political party, Ticana could help establish a political block comprising the country's southern and eastern departments. Ticana's political experience with three

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different governments demonstrates his ability to work beyond party lines to establish effective political connections and build consensus. As a Quechua, Ticana has the ability to take advantage of the political prominence indigenous groups now enjoy. Political analysts, however, note Ticana prefers to remain behind the scenes rather than seek a national leadership position. At a November 2006 indigenous roundtable with Ambassadors Goldberg and Shapiro, Ticana presented himself as a moderate political thinker who seeks to establish a political environment that values inclusion and dialogue.

15. (C) MARIO COSSIO CEJAS: Touting a wide range of experience in academia and politics, Tarija Prefect Mario Cossio's potential as a rising opposition leader is aided by his hydrocarbons-rich prefecture. Given Tarija's hydrocarbons revenues, Cossio is well-equipped to advance the agenda of the media luna (Pando, Beni, Tarija, and Santa Cruz departments), especially on regional autonomy. A member of Camino al Cambio, a civic political group, Cossio enjoys broad public support and is viewed positively by the Bolivian national media. His ability to rise as a national opposition leader may also be aided by his discreet role in the highly publicized divide between the media luna and the GOB, which could help Cossio attract more wide-ranging political support. Physically mestizo, Cossio can tap into the support President Morales now enjoys by Bolivians who identify with him and his background.

16. (C) RUBEN COSTAS: The public face of the media luna and a member of Autonomia Por Bolivia, Ruben Costas' position as prefect of the economic powerhouse Santa Cruz department gives him a natural edge in establishing himself as a regional opposition leader. Costas' willingness to work with the United States would make him a solid democratic partner. His politically savvy use of the media to advance the interests of the media luna have helped establish Costas as one of the primary political opposition leaders. His public

confrontations with the Morales administration, the latest bringing a public retraction by Morales of his accusations that Costas was involved in a plot against him, have helped Costas score public victories against the GOB. Given his close relationship with other prefects in eastern Bolivia and his leadership on regional autonomy, Costas is well-known and respected in the east. However, his close association with eastern Bolivia may limit him to a regional leadership position, as the Altiplano has historically opposed candidates hailing from the east, especially the Santa Cruz department.

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THE DINOSAURS  
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17. (C) JOSE LUIS PAREDES MUNOZ: A member of PODEMOS who values U.S. assistance in Bolivia, La Paz prefect Jose Luis Paredes stands out as a potential national opposition leader. In an October 11 meeting with ECOPOL, Paredes privately expressed his interest in obtaining U.S. support to run for the presidency (poloff explained that we do not intervene in Bolivia's internal affairs). As the former mayor of El Alto, Paredes has a strong base of support in the Altiplano, despite the efforts of several MAS-controlled social sector groups to drive him from office. With a history of demonstrating an ability to govern, Paredes has responded well to the enormous pressure he is under from his constituency and from the central government. With an eye towards his political future, Paredes is attempting to shore up support through a public relations campaign highlighting his accomplishments as prefect. However, Paredes remains very vulnerable to allegations of corruption in regard to charges filed against him on October 16 for actions allegedly committed while he was mayor of El Alto.

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18. (C) MANFRED REYES VILLA: A former presidential candidate, Cochabamba Prefect and Agrupacion Unidad por Cochabamba (AUC) leader Manfred Reyes Villa has a wealth of political experience and broad name recognition although whispers of corruption haunt him. Known for delivering on his promises, Reyes is popular among his constituents, which is particularly challenging given his position in an otherwise MAS-dominated prefecture. Despite his political experience, Reyes' political potential may have peaked during his 2002 presidential campaign, when he garnered approximately 22 percent of the national vote. Lacking a politically relevant party, Reyes ties to Bolivia's old guard politicians will likely keep him from regaining a national position. Although Reyes may be unable to assume a national role, he will likely remain an important player regionally.

19. (C) SAMUEL DORIA MEDINA: A wealthy prominent businessman and national political figure (since his third place finish in Bolivia's December 2005 national elections) Samuel Doria Medina is the head of the National Unity (UN) party and a delegate in the CA. An entrepreneur and former minister under ex-President Jaime Paz Zamora, Medina's financial resources and position within the CA enable him to coordinate a national opposition movement. Known for having political ambitions, Medina may try to thrust himself into the next presidential race without regard for his realistic chances of winning it. Medina's chances to run for the presidency, however, have been reportedly neutralized by his willingness to broker deals with the MAS in the CA and threats by the GOB to nationalize his businesses. While the impact of these reports are unknown, Medina would still have to find support outside his party and overcome the leftist, indigenous trend in Bolivian politics if he were to attempt a presidential campaign. In the meantime, Medina will likely continue to play a key role building consensus in the CA.

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IRRELEVANT

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¶10. (C) JORGE "TUTO" QUIROGA RAMIREZ: The recognized leader of PODEMOS, Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga is considered the glue that binds his party in the CA and in Bolivia's congress. Unfortunately, he seems tone-deaf to Bolivia's radically changed political environment, and has been unable to strike a chord with the population. As the leader of the largest opposition group in the CA and a former president, Quiroga remains Bolivia's primary opposition leader. Like Ortiz, Quiroga's leadership of PODEMOS may undermine his ability to win national office. Beginning late-November 2006, Quiroga has started to take a more public stance on divisive issues between his party and the GOB to build pressure and support for a two-thirds vote in the CA. While effective as a party leader, most political analysts concede Quiroga would not fare well in a future presidential race. In a recent meeting with the Ambassador, Quiroga appeared less interested in Bolivian politics than discussing foreign policy -- that of Bolivia as well as the U.S.

¶11. (C) OSCAR ORTIZ: An influential and well-known opposition senator from Santa Cruz, Oscar Ortiz has made a name for himself by using his political position to publicly criticize the GOB. A member of PODEMOS, with a background in business, Ortiz understands the intricacies of economics and can use his experience to communicate policies that would resonate with a Bolivian electorate that is increasingly focused on employment. Like Costas, his ties to eastern Bolivia and his pro-business outlook may diminish his ability to rise through the political ranks, particularly in light of GOB rhetoric against free market economics. Ortiz's affiliation with the PODEMOS party may also prevent his

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emergence as an opposition leader that can gain broad political appeal.

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LEFT FIELDERS  
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¶12. (S/NF) SANTOS RAMIREZ: The president of Bolivia's senate, Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) senator Santos Ramirez is considered the political confidant of President Morales. A lawyer by education and a teacher by training, Ramirez has an extensive history in politics as a member of congress before being elected to the senate in 2006. Born in the Potosi department, Ramirez is well-known in Potosi and serves as the head of the MAS party there. With a political career closely aligned to President Morales' legislative agenda, Ramirez' political future is considered heavily dependent on the political successes of the GOB. Rumored to be a major player in the MAS' political playbook, Ramirez is in a position to assume a leadership position in the event President Morales stumbles (reftel A). Ramirez' role in railroading controversial legislative measures supported by President Morales confirms the opinions of many political analysts who consider him a radical. Emboldened by the newfound wave of popularity President Morales is enjoying, Ramirez may shed his politically adept style for a more radical approach. With his strong alliances with the GOB, Ramirez may ride out the wave of President Morales' strong popularity before revealing his personal aspirations to emerge on Bolivia's national stage. Sensitive reporting indicates that Ramirez may be very vulnerable on corruption and human smuggling charges.

¶13. (C) FERNANDO HUANACUNI: A relative unknown in Bolivia's political sphere, professor, lawyer, and Aymara writer Fernando Huanacuni has raised the eyebrows of political analysts convinced President Morales' successor will hail from the country's indigenous community. Relatively young in political terms at thirty-nine years old, Huanacuni may present a fresh perspective that would be welcomed by a

growing population of young Bolivians frustrated with a government they view as unresponsive. A resident of El Alto and born in the La Paz department, Huanacuni's ability to galvanize support for a national run would directly challenge President Morales' base of support. Despite his lack of name recognition, Huanacuni's television show on social pressures is helping him gain wider recognition if he uses it as a method to raise his political profile. Similar to the assessments made for other indigenous politicians, Huanacuni's indigenous background could help him galvanize greater support.

¶14. (C) JUAN DEL GRANADO: Known as the "the Gardener" for his passionate support for environmentally-friendly public works, La Paz Mayor Juan del Granado is popular among his constituency for his efforts to reform La Paz and fight corruption. He stands as a likely candidate to emerge nationally from the MAS' rank-and-file if the opportunity presented itself. A former member of the MIR and the Movimiento Bolivia Libre (MBL), Granado is the founder and current leader of the Movimiento Sin Miedo (MSM), a political party he started when he ran for mayor that is now allied with the MAS. In addition to the publicity Granado enjoys from his position, his skillful use of radio and television for constituent outreach help him raise his profile among the electorate while highlighting his accomplishments in office. Despite his alliances with MAS, however, Granado political viability remains murky at best. Considered a member of the middle class, Granado would likely have to counter negative perceptions of the middle class among the indigenous community and traditionally marginalized groups to court their vote. A former minister in the Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada administration, Granado would be an easy target for

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this past association and this would present a high hurdle for Granado to clear in a national run for office.

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (C) The December 2005 and July 2006 national elections exposed what turned out to be a hollow center of leadership in Bolivia's political traditional political classes. It was in this vacuum that Evo Morales took the presidency; Bolivia's traditional leaders are still reacting to the earthquake his victory represented. The rough-and-tumble politics favored by Morales have further exposed the many weaknesses of the traditional opposition. Most recently, the emergence of divisive issues within the CA has spurred some political leaders to action, and offered tentative clues to possible alternative opposition leadership. While a resurgence of the old opposition is possible, it is unlikely that Bolivia's future leader will be one of the political dinosaurs and irrelevant leaders of the past. Bolivia remains an overwhelmingly poor country. Given the leftward shift of rhetoric among many voters, a post-Morales environment would likely offer serious electoral advantages to a leader emerging from Evo's indigenous supporters. If Morales were to exit unexpectedly, an indigenous or strong regional leader would be the most likely candidate to fill his position. This year, President Morales has had a lucky run, with high hydrocarbons and other commodity revenues leaving him abundant room to maneuver. That situation will change dramatically, however, when his economic luck runs out. End Comment.  
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